DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 840 SP 033 637

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TITLE The Douma School Project.
PUB DATE Feb 92
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented as a research project at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators (72nd, Orlando, FL, February 15-19, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Collegiality; *Cooperating Teachers; Elementary Education; *Experimental Programs; Higher Education; Interpersonal Communication; Mentors; Preservice Teacher Education; Research Needs; School Districts; *Student Teachers; Student Teacher Supervisors; *Student Teaching; *Time Factors (Learning)
IDENTIFIERS *Collaborative Talk; Ottumwa Regional Center IA; Reflecting (Communication)

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to compare and contrast the nontraditional placement of student teachers in a single school for an entire semester rather than the more traditional approach of placement in several buildings during the same time period. Student teachers (N=25) were assigned to the Ottumwa (Iowa) Regional Center. Of these, 19 were placed following the traditional approach, while the other 6 were assigned to the Douma School, selected as an experimental site. Data were gathered through observation and interviews of all professional personnel. Results suggest that advantages offered to Douma School teachers-in-training include: strengthened professional relationships among cooperating teachers, student teachers, pupils, and university supervisors; and expanded opportunities for collaboration, mentoring, reflection, collegiality, and bonding. In addition, student teachers were offered in-depth exposure to "real teacher" experiences such as assignment to teacher committees, placement on duty rosters, and inclusion in all inservice training. A disadvantage frequently reported was the inability to practice in another building and another environment for the purpose of starting over after having had the benefit of some teaching experience. Further research utilizing this paradigm is recommended. (LL)

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The Douma School Project

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Presented as a research project at the National Conference of the Association of Teacher Educators in Orlando, FL in February, 1992.

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The Douma School Project

Introduction

There are some problems in traditional student teaching programs according to Guyton and McIntyre (1990) and Stahlhut and Hawkes (1990). These problems - logistics, personnel, site selection, and program organization - reduce the value of the student teaching experience and limit opportunities for successful professional relationships between cooperating teachers, student teachers, pupils, and university supervisors.

One of the specific personnel problems identified is that collegiality is dependent upon the establishment of a personal and professional bond. Not enough time together creates isolation between student teachers and cooperating teachers. One study on bonding by Lemlech and Kaplan (1990) found that when student teachers interact frequently and over an extended period of time with other student teachers they recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses. As student teacher collegiality develops they reflect together. Reflection promotes bonding (Mahlois, 1986). Therefore, more time for reflection could reduce the isolation in their experience.

Watts (1987) states that one site selection problem is the quality of the experience depends too much on a specific classroom environment which is beyond the control of the university. If a student teacher spent more time in one setting the university supervisor could become more familiar

with the setting and probably have a greater influence. It can be reasonably concluded that an extended amount of time in one school environment might have a distinct advantage for student teachers.

The objective of this study was to observe advantages/disadvantages of placing student teachers in one building for a whole semester. Because the perceptions of the various participants were of interest in assessing the effectiveness of the arrangement, qualitative research methods including extensive interviewing and observation were used.

The Douma School Setting

Douma Elementary School was selected as the experimental site because of the distinctive culture of this building. The faculty are very close, there are three large instructional pods with six open-space classrooms and 125 children in each area. Departmentalization and team teaching are practiced and faculty are encouraged to explore opportunities for program experimentation. Seventy percent of the pupils in this building qualify for free or reduced lunches. Many pupils are identified as being at-risk. The "Hawthorne Effect" exists in this building, i.e. faculty work hard to achieve success whenever they are selected to be part of a pilot program.

The professor met with the principal initially and then with the entire faculty. He outlined how the traditional

student teaching program would be altered. Changes included:

1) Student teachers would be placed at Douma for the full semester. Student teachers would work with two cooperating teachers at Douma. Typically, student teachers are placed (8 weeks) in one building and then moved to a second building for another (8 weeks) assignment.

2) Student teachers would be assigned to regular teacher committees, placed on duty rosters, and included in all inservice training programs. Sometimes this happens in the traditional program, but never to the extent designed into this project.

3) The professor would be a facilitator, confidant, resource person, and a researcher who would collect data by observing and interviewing all professional personnel. Traditionally the professor observes the student teacher, conferences, helps evaluate the student teacher, and is a trouble-shooter.

4) Operational procedures, such as which cooperating teachers were assigned a student teacher, would be decided by the principal and his advisory committee. (See figure 1.) Greater decision making regarding the assignment process was determined by Douma personnel. Traditionally the professor recommends placements. He

does not involve practitioners in the assignment process.

Student Teacher Placements at Douma

Student Teacher	#1 8/20-10/19	#2 10/28-12/20
#1	Grade 3	Chapter 1 Reading
#2	Grade K	Grade 1
#3	Grade K	Grade 3
#4	Grade 5	Grade 6
#5	Grade 2	P.E. (K-6)
#6	Grade 4	Sp. Ed. (M.C.)

Figure 1

There were 25 student teachers assigned to the Ottumwa Regional Center. Douma faculty agreed to work with 6 of the student teachers. The other 19 were placed in traditional assignments.

Findings and Discussion

Douma school became a clinical teaching site. James, Etheridge and Liles (1991) say these are schools where the professional staff elects to add teacher preparation to its purpose.

At the first faculty meeting during the pre-school workshops the principal introduced the student teachers as "associates". He created a supportive environment by demonstrating his enthusiasm for this project. From that point, Douma became a learning laboratory for the student teachers. Student teachers were trained to use "Positive Action Program" materials, "Write to read" computer lessons,

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and "Site-based Management" collection procedures. Student teachers became familiar with every teacher and were encouraged to use any of the 31 faculty as a resource person. Even the support personnel, aides and custodians, tried to provide special help to the student teachers. The student teachers were quickly accepted as young professionals. Their opinions mattered and they were encouraged to ask questions. To a parent or visitor it appeared that Douma had a faculty of 37. Two contributing factors to the success of this clinical site was the fact that the student teachers started when the teachers did in the fall and that on the first day of school many pupils discovered they had two teachers in their classroom.

Initial comments confirmed this project was different than the traditional program. " I feel like a real teacher. My roommate has not had these opportunities." "My cooperating teacher and I are learning together." "It helps both of us because we can discuss and ask each other to clarify aspects of these programs we did not understand." "I am not concerned about the extra costs (said the principal) because the pay off is in the student teacher's excitement. Their enthusiasm serves to remind us all how exciting it is to be a teacher.

The quality of the student teaching experience is very much influenced by communications between the student teacher and cooperating teacher that discuss what works and

what doesn't (Lemlech and Kaplan, 1990) and by how quickly student teachers get professional feedback through reflective conversations (Schon, 1983). During placement #1 five of the six cooperating teachers wrote in their student teachers' journals on a regular basis. All student teachers keep journals, but written responses by cooperating teachers at Douma were more frequent than is typical in traditional placements. Entries in Douma student teacher journals were more frequent even though topics were parallel to entries written by student teachers in traditional settings. Student teachers recorded entries that included advice from the professor. This meant the cooperating teacher also saw these suggestions. Professor talk with a student teacher is not a typical entry in journals of student teachers in traditional settings.

Student teachers and Douma teachers discussed the communication and feedback processes. "I promised my student teacher that I would not only read her journal entries, but I would also write comments back to her." "Reflection is something I naturally do. I did not realize until this experience that my student teacher needed to learn how to become reflective. Because we talked about her journal entries her reflection skills improved during this placement." "I summarize my journal each week so I and my cooperating teacher know how much I have learned." "When I

looked back at the student teachers journal summaries I was better able to evaluate her progress."

Social skills and personal behaviors of student teachers can negatively influence relationships between cooperating teachers and student teachers (Seperson and Joyce, 1973).

At Douma, a longer period together meant student teacher's behaviors needed to be confronted and modified. All student teachers are assigned a mentor teacher in addition to a cooperating teacher. The mentor is a person who is not an evaluator, they are an advisor, listener, interpreter, and advocate. The mentor for the six Douma student teachers discussed professional and social behaviors at one of her monthly meetings. Mentors typically discuss social skills and behaviors because it has been observed by the university supervisors in the traditional program that there is a need for this conversation. In this project it was clearly documented that cooperating teachers also feel there is a need for someone to discuss these issues with student teachers. Cooperating teachers would prefer that the university accept this responsibility. The professor was told by cooperating teachers of the need for student teachers to alter some of their behaviors and asked to convey the message to them.

Behaviors needing to be altered varied. "If she was only going to be here for one placement I would not say

anything about her sense of humor. I would tolerate it!" "He uses poor grammar in the faculty lounge. My colleagues told me I must say something to him. They won't put up with that for 17 weeks." "She puts her elbows on the table when she eats. She looks like she is shoveling her food into her mouth. I can hardly watch her eat."

Collaboration in field experiences between student teachers, practitioners, and professors will reshape everyone's roles if interactions are responsive, specific, and focused on an agreed upon structure (Stahlhut and Hawkes, 1990).

The professor spent most of his time in conversation with cooperating teachers. He sought them out, saw them in the faculty lounge, and he talked to them on the telephone. He made more suggestions of things cooperating teachers could try and he did more to follow-up to find out how well the suggestions worked. Actually, the amount of time the professor spent at Douma was probably less than he would spend supervising six traditional student teachers. Much of his time was spent developing a culture of acceptance for this project and discussing alternatives with the principal and cooperating teachers. Between the university supervisor and the six student teachers a collegial and parental relationship seemed to exist. Alot of conversation, that resulted in an exchange of ideas, was a large part of this experience. Individuals asked for advice about teaching. A

normal thing to do. But they also asked for advice about personal issues. The frequency of these questions was greater than usual. The professor became a father figure in some instances. A role he would have preferred not to play.

Statements from cooperating teachers and student teachers confirmed collaboration. "It seems we are seeing more of you than we normally do," said a cooperating teacher to the professor. "I (cooperating teacher) am really happy that we get to talk so often. I use to wonder if the university really cared about what I thought. Now I see my ideas being listened to and even some of them being implemented." "I (student teacher) did not expect you (the professor) would become my friend. I really like it when we talk. Thanks for sharing so many ideas of ways I can become a more successful teacher." "I tried your idea. It worked! Thank you for taking the time to help me solve a potential problem."

When there is change you can expect conflict. The goal of an effective leader is to manage the amount of change and conflict so goals can be achieved (Burns, 1978).

One student teacher got off to a weak start. Her second cooperating teacher knew about the situation. In the traditional program a student teacher would transfer to another building so her second cooperating teacher would probably be unaware of specific situations where the student teacher got herself into trouble. Hence, the student

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teacher would get a fresh start. Some of the student teachers changed assignments that put them in situations where they worked with some or all of the pupils from their #1 placement. Typically, the student teacher moves on to another building so previous pupils do not see them again. Some student teachers in #2 placement had a new cooperating teacher who had different expectations concerning management, etc. Student teachers adjusted, but their pupils from #1 placement had a harder time seeing their former student teacher in a new role.

Negative impacts of this project were documented. "I (student teacher) sometimes wish I could have a second placement in another school so I could start all over again. My discipline got me in trouble and it took me a long time to figure out what would work. My cooperating teacher was frustrated and everyone knew it. Now I know better and I've learned some things I can do. I hope my second cooperating teacher doesn't hold this against me." "Everytime the student teacher comes into the pod her pupils from placement #1 think they need to say hi or wave hello." "Because the student teacher knows the children from her #1 placement. She is having a problem establishing control with them in this setting." "My brother says hello. He wants you to write to him."

One aspect of the traditional program that was desired by a few of the Douma student teachers was getting an

opportunity to be in a new environment. Not moving to a second school environment like the traditional student teachers do meant the Douma student teachers did not have to adjust to new school rules, learn new school procedures, or do anything else to adjust to a new situation. Because their second cooperating teacher already knew them, adjusting to a new cooperating teacher's personality was minimized. As a result, the Douma student teachers tended to start teaching in placement #2 faster than their traditional peers. Maybe this disadvantage was an advantage?

A comment suggesting a desire to experience a new environment only surfaced once according to the professor's notes. However, the mentor reported a greater frequency. "I know I am learning alot. There are so many things I like about being here. However, I sometimes wish I could also know what it would be like to be in another building, in another environment."

Conclusions

1. There was more of a whole school commitment to the student teaching program than is traditionally observed. All the teachers, support personnel, and the administration were active observers, and resource persons for the student teachers. The result was student teachers were more like regular faculty. The only difference seemed to be on the

5th and 20th of the month; student teachers received no paychecks.

2. Student teachers had some experiences not available to student teachers in traditional programs. They worked on teacher committees, they had opportunities to see the impacts of decisions on a longer term basis, they worked with brothers and sisters, and they had a chance to get to know their second cooperating teacher before they started working together.

3. Student teachers had observational experiences only in different school environments. They did not have the opportunity to compare and contrast differences in elementary schools.

4. There was a placebo effect on the student teachers. They verbalized they had learned more from this pilot project than their peers learned in their traditional experience. They thought they were special because they were part of this project. They adopted the "Hawthorne Effect" that is openly displayed by the Douma faculty. The evaluations of these six student teachers were not significantly higher than evaluations for the other 19 student teachers in the Ottumwa Center during the fall semester of 1991. Proof of their success was subjective.

Recommendations

This alternative delivery system has some merits that would justify using this format in the future. Because faculty more actively participate in the student teachers' experience, because the professor's supervisory load could probably be reduced once this program has been established, and because student teachers have some in-depth exposures not available in traditional environments we would recommend that this paradigm be continued and used as another way to provide student teaching clinical field experiences.

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